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The Word Abused . . .

"WHATSOEVER IS NOT OF FAITH IS SIN"

This line of scripture, lifted from Ro. 14:23, is a classic example of how men so abuse the word as to make it mean something entirely different from what the writer intended. The lesser sin is to do this unwittingly, without giving careful study to the context; the greater sin is to make a verse mean what *we* want it to mean, so as to justify some party line or to put some brother at naught. The lesser sin is evident when men pass along what they have always heard, parroting the cliches of their fore bearers, uncritically applying the scriptures in a sectarian manner. The greater sin, which is far less excusable, is to know better and yet go right on abusing the word for partisan advantage. The old bromide, "I haven't met a man yet that can answer it!" is relied on more than an honest examination of the text.

In the party in which I was reared and schooled, this passage is connected with Ro. 10:17, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," so as to show that if a particular practice is not mentioned in scripture (always something *we* oppose), then it is sinful. For something to be "of faith," therefore, it must be in the Bible, for "faith" comes by hearing God's word. It makes a perfect argument against the likes of instrumental music, and it is as sound as an Aristotelian syllogism.

Whatever is not of faith is sin.

Instrumental music is not of faith.

Therefore, instrumental music is a sin.

There is a sense in which that conclusion may well be true, in the light of what the apostle was *actually* teaching, as applied to some people, but I'll speak of that later. Let's look first at the unwarranted liberties men take in handling the word in such a manner as this.

This argument depends upon Ro. 10:17, which can be expressed as another syllogism.

If something is a matter of faith, then it can be heard (or read) in the word of God. (Ro. 10:17).

Instrumental music cannot be heard (or read) in the word of God (implying New Testament).

Therefore, instrumental music is not a matter of faith.

Then comes the first syllogism. Since instrumental music is not a matter of faith, it is a sin (Ro. 14:23).

These syllogisms are valid, obeying all the rules of any logic text. But it so happens that an argument can be valid and logical and yet yield a false conclusion, such as:

All subscribers of Restoration Review are octoroons.

The one reading these words is a subscriber of Restoration Review.

Therefore, the one reading these words is an octoroon.

We love and accept as brothers all octoroons who are in Jesus, but I dare say we have very few on our subscription list. And there is nothing wrong with being an octoroon. But there is something wrong with that syllogism, just as there is with the other two. It does not *necessarily* follow that instrumental music is a sin or that it is not a matter of faith, just as it does not *necessarily* follow that you, a subscriber of this journal, are an octoroon.

One does not need a course in logic to realize that there is a difference between logic and truth. One may not get far with truth if he is illogical, but he can certainly be logical without being truthful. Has anyone ever accused Satan of being either stupid or illogical?

To examine an argument we must first look at its terminology. You would not know whether you are an octaroon or not, if you did not know what the word meant. Just so, in the first two syllogisms the term "of faith" can be misleading, causing one to draw a wrong conclusion. In fact, "faith" in Ro. 10:17 is different from the "of faith" in Ro. 14:23, while the argument implies that they are the same. This itself destroys the argument, for one equivocates when he uses a term in two different ways in the same argument, or when he uses a term that means something different in two contexts as if they meant the same. It is like arguing: *Man is the highest creature on the evolutionary ladder; therefore, man is superior to woman.* If we argue about "faith" from two different passages, as if the meaning of the word were the same, then the meaning must be the same. But this is not the case with Ro. 10:17 and Ro. 14:23, as we shall be seeing.

People who use the scriptures in this way always end up proving too much. If this kind of reasoning is sound, which means that it is true as well as logical, then it would go this way just as well:

Whatever is not of faith is a sin.

Plural cups (for Lord's Supper) is not of faith.

Therefore, plural cups are a sin.

Once you tie in Ro. 10:17 the argument is a clincher. One reads about cups nowhere in scripture, nor is there any example of such. Since Jesus took "the cup," there is no way to make plural cups a matter *of faith,* for "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

The minor premise can be adjusted to fit all party distinctions, whether classes, literature, agencies, societies, sponsoring churches, owning real estate, pastor system, choirs, stained glass windows, orphanages, and on and on. The couplet of Ro. 10:17 and Ro. 14:23, joined in argument as described herein, is unanswerable —"I haven't met the man yet that could answer it!" It is unanswerable *if the terms in the premises are allowed to mean what the person making the argument wants them to mean.*

But we can't have it both ways: using it against those who practice what we oppose, but rejecting it when made by those who oppose what we practice. We have debated long and loud in defense of the Sunday School, insisting that it is "of faith," that is, in the scriptures, when the non-Sunday School folk use the argument against us. Then we hammer away at the instrumentalists of the Christian Churches, making the same argument that others make against us, oblivious of the difficulty we create for ourselves in so doing.

The context of Ro. 14 makes it clear what Paul means by saying, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." By following the word *faith* as it appears through the chapter, one can see that it is made to mean a good conscience or to perform certain acts without doubting. In verse 1, for instance, the one who is "weak in faith" is not weak in his trust that Jesus is Lord, but weak in that he has a vulnerable conscience. He is likely to violate his conscience in eating meats and drinking wine. He may even have a more vital faith than the "strong in faith," but he is more likely to sin in reference to these things in that he has doubts about them while the others do not.

Verse 2 makes this clear: "For one believes that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eats herbs. The weak brother has doubts about meat, fearing perhaps that it was sacrificed to an idol, so he chooses to be a vegetarian. The "strong" brother, who is really the liberal, believes (that is, he has no doubts) he can eat both meat and vegetables.

Verse 5 says, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," which means that he is to act so as to have a good conscience with no doubts. The next two verses show that one's scruples about eat, drink, and keeping holy days are between him and the Lord. We do not have to judge him, for he is the Lord's man. If he is not really conscientious in his protestations, the Lord will judge him, for it is before him that he stands or falls (verse 4).

Verse 10 asks a searching question: "But why dost thou judge thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." This is to say that each of us has his own faith (his own scruples about things), and so we are not to judge each other and set each other at naught in respect to them, for Jesus is the judge, and we will all one day stand before him. And he'll know whether we have really acted in good conscience - so we don't have to take that judgment upon ourselves, for we can't know each other's hearts anyway!

Verse 13 repeats the injunction against judging, and adds: "No man is to put a stumbling-block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way." This warns against infringing upon his *faith*, those opinions *he* holds that he must hold true to. I am not to act in any

manner that would cause him to sin against his own conscience, for this would be "an occasion to fall." This is why verse 15 says that I might grieve him with my meat, and so "destroy him for whom Christ died" —by causing him to sin against his own conscience through the stumbling block that I put in his way. 1 Cor. 8:12 is appropriate here. "Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."

And so in verse 17 he shows that the kingdom of God is not a matter of keeping each other straight on all such regulations, but a matter of *peace* between brothers and *joy* in the Holy Spirit. Verse 19 further stresses that our mission as brothers is not to be judgmental toward each other, but it is a mission of peace and encouragement.

Then in verse 22 he asks, *Hast thou faith? Have it to thyself before God.* Again, this has no reference to one's belief in the gospel. It is rather like asking, *Do you have certain convictions about these things we're talking about?* If so, he adds, you are to have them before God. You don't have to be judged by your brothers in reference to them. That verse also reveals that Paul considers a man blessed who can behave in such a way that his conscience does not condemn him "Happy is he that condemns not himself in that thing which he allows."

That *faith* in this chapter means "to have no doubt in what one does" is evident from the very line that precedes "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." It reads, "He that doubts is damned if he eat, because he eats not of faith." Thus to act without faith is to act with doubt. The passage of our inquiry now makes all the sense it needs to: Whatsoever one does, not really believing that it is right for him to do, is a sin for him.

This takes us back to my statement following the first syllogism, to the effect that one might be sinning in using the instrument, for "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." It *would* be sinful for him since he believes it to be wrong. But the one who so believes (has that scruple or opinion) is not to judge the brother who does not so believe.

That is the meaning of Ro. 14:23. It teaches me that I am to behave with a good conscience. I am to be my own man, an authentic person, not other directed, except by the Lord himself. I am not to allow circumstances to dictate to me. I am to act with *good faith.* from my heart of hearts, and not allow people to con me into doing what to *me* would be wrong, however justified *they* might be in doing it. And the chapter as a whole is teaching me that I am to allow for that same self-authenticity in my brother. If I tinker with his conscience, I might destroy him. The Lord has placed a "Keep Off" sign on every brother's conscience. If it so happens that he has a bad conscience after all, and my kindly overtures were misplaced, I don't have to worry about that. I am not to judge him. God will take care of all the rest without any help from me. He is my brother, not my servant, and so it is not my prerogative to preside over his soul.

Ro. 10:17 ("Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God") has no particular connection with Ro. 14:23. You could choose another verse at random from the Bible and it would fit just as well, which is to say that it doesn't fit at all. That verse teaches that one must hear (or read) the gospel if he has faith. The preceding verse refers to Isaiah's query, *Who has believed our report?*, which the apostle relates to the gospel: "But they have not all obeyed the gospel" (verse 16). The *report* is the gospel, and that is how faith in Christ comes. That use of "faith" is entirely different from what we have in Ro. 14.

All this is terribly trifling and naive. Some of my teachers in the universities would smile over such a problem. Tiddle winks! They would say, "Well, *of course* that is what those verses mean. Why the big deal?" It would be difficult for them to believe that many of our leaders warp and twist such verses as these, generation after generation, and still have people duped by such interpretation.

So the big deal comes from the fact that our schools of preaching, some in the Church of Christ colleges, some in the pulpits and in the columns of "our" journals still teach this kind of stuff, to their shame. They actually abuse the scriptures for the sake of party antagonisms. They take the very verses that teach us to be loving and accepting and non-judgmental, and twist them into meaning that a brother sins when he has a practice that runs counter to our own party peeves. They abuse their brothers by abusing the Bible!

If we pronounce something to be a sin, let it be based on a "Thus saith the Lord," upon what is clearly and distinctly set forth in scripture. When we move into the area of opinions and deductions (where there is legitimate grounds for differences), let us be very cautious with the way we handle the Bible. To abuse one another is grievous enough, but to abuse one another by abusing the word smells to heaven like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Surely "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" speaks to us in that context somewhere. It would surely speak to *me*, if I used those verses that way. —*the Editor*

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The Word Abused . . .

Crumbs on the Platter

We all have experienced it often, those of us who break bread regularly with the saints. As often as not the "one loaf" that is passed before us is not a loaf at all, but a plate full of crumbs. The matzo (and don't you think the Church of Christ should have its own matzo factory?) is often baked with little lines running through it, crisscrossed, so that very small squares can be pinched off. These are sometimes separated before serving, which leaves

scores of tiny squares in the platter. This makes it easy for each participant to take his tiny portion, but one is left to wonder what happened to the scriptural notion of "breaking bread."

When the matzo is boxed up as thin wafers, unsegmented, which is the usual way, somebody at the table will smash them into smithereens before they are passed among the believers. Each of us, therefore, looks down upon, not "the loaf" that the apostle speaks of in scripture, but crumbs on a platter. Since Jesus speaks of "take and *eat,"* I try to ferret out a crumb of such a size to be eaten. But some are left to practice what the Roman Catholics prefer —let the wafer dissolve in the mouth —since they can't possibly eat a tiny crumb. I recall one occasion when the sister sitting next to me reached into the platter with her long, manicured nails and came up with a mere slither of a crumb, a piece that most of us could not have garnered without a pair of tweezers, or *her* finger nails.

This is to abuse, through negligence, the beautiful symbol of the Lord's Supper. What of Paul's statement in 1 Co. 10:17: "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf." He also says: "The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" (verse 16)

One body, one loaf. The symbol is evident enough. The Supper is a testimonial to the oneness of the believers.

In gathering around one loaf they are pledging themselves to be but one body. This is why the Supper is such an impressive expression of unity and fellowship. When this unity did not exist the apostle would say, "It is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (1 Co. 11:20). It is when a believer chooses to remain sectarian, even while breaking the bread that is a symbol of the unity he should preserve, that he brings judgment upon himself. He who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment on himself if he does not discern the Body" (1 Co. 11:29). I have used the *New English Bible* here because it properly uses the capital *B* for Body, which shows that the apostle is not referring to the bread, but to the Body, the church. If I fail to discern the oneness of the Body, and go right on with a sectarian Supper in which I include only my crowd, I not only do not *really* take the Supper, but I am bringing damnation on myself.

So, maybe our crumbs on the platter are appropriate after all, for we allow ourselves to be divided and separated into sects, refusing to share life in the Son together. The crumbs seem to be as numerous as all our sects, so perhaps we are doing it right after all! That would have been appropriate for the Corinthians, *crumbs!*

Before I go further I must confess to being anti-matzo. Matzo is by definition "a flat, thin unleavened bread eaten by Jews during the Passover." There is no reason for us to make the Lord's Supper Jewish in this sense, buying their bread and following their custom. We should encourage our sisters to bake bread especially for the occasion, *one* loaf appropriate to the size of the congregation. Or simply place a loaf on the table right

off the grocer's shelf, Manor's or Mrs. Baird's would be fine, unsliced! There is no instruction in scripture that it must be unleavened, though we *always* have it that way, as if we presumed it was required. Matthew tells us that "Jesus took bread," which was unleavened only because that's all they had in the house during Passover. It does not say that he chose unleavened bread. When ever we *take* bread, the ordinary bread that we have in our homes, we are doing as he did.

But if unleavened bread has more symbolic value to us (though there is no reason why it should), let the sisters prepare such bread, as they often do in many of our rural churches and, interestingly enough, in our freer congregations that seek a break from traditionalism.

We probably should not use a cloth to cover the table, for we then cover the meaning that the Supper is to convey by its very presence. It ought to be that as one takes his place in the assembly his eyes will soon fall upon the cup and the loaf on the bare table before him. *One* loaf, not two or three or more, should be on the table. Paul makes it clear: "Because there is one loaf. . ." As we look upon that one loaf we are reminded not only of Jesus' body, given for us, but of the unity that the loaf represents. If we prefer to cover the table with a cloth, then the saints should see, clearly visible, the *one* loaf, when the cloth is removed, This is why I would prefer *leavened* bread, for it makes for a more imposing symbol, rich and round and full of life as the Body of Christ should be.

The brother who presides (the Christian Churches appropriately have elders serving the Supper as a rule, especially the one who presides —should hold the one loaf aloft before the congregation, speaking of what it means to us —"The bread which we break, is it not a communion with the body of Christ" (1 Co. 10:16) —and he should then bless it and break it (Mt. 26:26), which symbolizes the sacrifice Jesus made for our oneness as brothers. If the assembly is not too large, the two pieces of the loaf can be passed among them. If the assembly is larger, the loaf should be larger, and if need be, it might be broken into several large portions, and passed.

We should *eat* of the loaf, that is the description we have in the scriptures. I would like to be able to break a portion from the loaf at least one-fourth the size of a candy bar, so that I can really *eat* it, and spend enough time doing so as to think about what I'm doing. We are to break and eat bread together, not pick up crumbs and let them dissolve in our mouths.

A few of our "far out" groups observe the Supper by passing large hunks of rather hard, crusty bread among them, without any plates, from one person's hand to the next, each breaking a portion from it and *eating* it in the name of the Lord. I like that. We will restore some of the lost value of the Supper if we can each break from the loaf and eat, and then pass that same loaf into the hand of the brother beside us. Even in our larger churches I can see one long, imposing loaf, perhaps the curvaceous, crusty French bread, gracing the Lord's table, especially baked for the occasion if necessary. Once blessed and broken,

it could be distributed in such a manner that the occasion would have some semblance of "breaking bread together."

Well, by now I suppose some of you think I have completely lost my mind. You had just as soon go your matzo way and continue assembling with the saints each week to pick up crumbs. And, yes, keep on believing that it *has* to be unleavened bread. I can only ask that you think about it. When Paul looked in on Corinth and found them divided, is it not significant that he would say, "Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf."

So that you might see that I am somewhat in line with some of the best thinking of the Restoration Movement in this regard, I will close with a quotation from Alexander Campbell's *Christian System*, p. 268.

"Proposition 3 - *On the Lord's table there is of necessity but one loaf.*

The necessity is not that of a positive law enjoining one loaf and only one, as the ritual of Moses enjoined twelve loaves. But it is a necessity arising from the meaning of the Institution as explained by the Apostles. As there is but one literal body, and but one mystical or figurative body having many members; so there must be but one loaf . . . 'Because there is one loaf,' says Paul, 'we must consider the whole congregation as one body.' Here the Apostle reasons from what is more plain to what is less plain; from what was established to what was not so fully established in the minds of the Corinthians. There was no dispute about the one loaf; therefore, there ought to be none but the one body. This mode of reasoning makes it as certain as a positive law; because that which an Apostle reasons from must be an established fact or an established principle . . . It was, then, an established institution that there is but one loaf." *—the Editor*

In how many of our congregations is *one* loaf *taken, blessed, broken,* and *given?* That is the New Testament pattern just as much as baptism was and is by immersion. Today our people stress the concept of unleaven bread more than the action involved. *—John Mills, at North American Christian Convention, 1975*

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What Kind of a Book is the Bible? . . .

HOW DOES THE BIBLE TEACH US?

(Is it by direct command, approved example, and necessary inference?)

All of us who share a common faith in Jesus as Lord look to the Bible as authoritative. In our less charitable moments we accuse each other of "not believing in the scriptures" or "not accepting the authority of the Bible" when disagreements are not readily resolved. It is a mark of a sect to presume that it and it alone really accepts biblical authority. We should be able to see that people can come up with different views about the scriptures even when they all accept the authority of the scriptures. A large part of the problem is that we differ as to *how* the Bible teaches us. Men can agree on the source of the authority and yet differ as to how that authority speaks to them. Our own U.S. Constitution is an example of this, with the strict and loose constructionists interpreting it differently. That is why we have a Supreme Court. As to who is to serve as our "supreme court" in reference to biblical authority is one question we all have to get settled.

Since boyhood I have been taught that the scriptures teach us in three ways: by direct command, approved example, and necessary inference. Abundant illustrations can be given for each of these, albeit they have to be rather carefully selected. I am presently convinced that this approach is of no real value in applying biblical authority. This is because some commands in scripture are clearly not for us all; *approved* examples are not always distinguishable, and the question remains as to who is to decide which ones are approved; inferences can be tricky and confusing as to whether necessary or unnecessary, with the matter of proper application still unsolved.

Take the four commands that we have in the apostolic letter to Gentile congregations as recorded in Acts 15:28-29: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from unchastity." These are clearly "direct" commands to Gentile believers, with all the authority of an apostolic letter. But the church has paid little attention to them since around 200 A.D.

These commands were given so as to make less difficult the sharing of the common life between believing Jews and Gentile saints, sometimes referred to as laws for "table fellowship" since they are mostly food regulations. The apostles probably had no objection to their Gentile brethren eating meats that had not been properly drained of blood, or meat that had been sacrificed to an idol; but such practice would be offensive to the Jews, whose responsibility it was to accept them as brothers. Even the rule against unchastity was probably injunction against their marrying their kin, as prohibited in Lev. 18, which was another sore spot with Jews who were being asked to accept Gentiles.

So here we have four commands in one paragraph of the Bible, directly from the apostles to Gentile churches, that are not for us —not as they were for them at least. They teach us to forbear and to make personal sacrifices for the sake of a happier fellowship. But hardly any of us would contend that it is a sin to eat blood pudding however

unappetizing to most of us. And none of us drains meat of blood as would an orthodox Jewish butcher.

That passage teaches us *something*, as I have shown. but it is misleading to point to "direct commands," for we see that these do not apply to us as they did to them. So how does the Bible teach us in this context? Hardly by example or inference. I would say it is *the sense of scripture*, which comes only through responsible interpretation.

Here is another direct command: "Give to him who begs from you, and do not refuse him who would borrow from you" (Mt. 5:42). It is of no help simply to class this as a direct command, and to say the Bible teaches this way. It is *the sense of scripture* that must be ascertained. Most of us do not believe we have to lend money to all who would borrow or always give to him who begs. Such would simply make life impossible. It surely teaches that generosity is a Christian grace; perhaps it teaches us to be *very* generous with all that we have and are.

The holy kiss is commanded several times. Foot washing is referred to in John 13 as *both* a command and an example (apparently "approved" since it is Jesus who sets the example!). But *the sense of scripture* goes much deeper than the physical act. The "sense" is that Jesus is showing us how we are to love one another in lots of different ways. Perhaps Ouida and I are washing feet through this humble publication effort; a Peace Corps worker might be doing it by cleaning latrines.

There are examples on almost every page of holy writ. It is of little help to say that the Bible teaches us in this way, for each example has to be weighed to determine its meaning for us. It is better to say that *the example* of Jesus is what the Bible is all about. "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). We can all buy that! The whole of scripture, Old and New Covenant alike, is focused on Jesus, pointing up *his* example, so that we might be conformed to his image. I cannot see that any further reference to examples has any particular meaning to us. Surely the disciples and the various churches had experiences and did things that are informative. When they are faithful and heroic, we want to be like them; when they are not, we don't. It is as they point us to Jesus that we are to take special notice.

Out of all that the scriptures say, examples and all, norms and forms emerge as to what a faithful disciple should be and do, and what a true Church of Christ should be like. But this does not mean that a hard and fast line can be drawn, delineating this or that example as "approved" or not, or listing precisely the commands that are "direct" and those that are not. As we saturate our minds and hearts with scripture, praying in the Spirit for guidance, God's will for us begins to emerge. Acts 20:7 may not emerge as a clear-cut case for disciples breaking bread each Sunday and only then, but it is a vital piece of information that we are to give its proper place. We should allow it to mean no more or no less than

what it says. There is no reason to put an "approved example" tag on it or any other tag. It stands in scripture as *descriptive* of a particular church on a particular occasion, and that's where the faithful student of the word will leave it.

A "*necessary* inference" is really a logical term, referring to a conclusion drawn from a premise of premises. If I see a pink house, I can *infer* that it is painted. If a man owns all the gold at Ft. Knox, I can *infer* that he is rich. But some inferences are not so sure. If my neighbor sends his children to a parochial school, I can infer that he is a Roman Catholic. If a man is a Texan, I can infer that he has an oil well. Hardly!

Some inferences from scripture are reliable enough. "When Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water" infers that he went down into the water, for one does not come up from without first going down into. But I can't see that this means that we should make a particular point of the Bible teaching by "necessary inference." It is simply a characteristic of all literature that it contains inferential language. When inferences appear in scripture, we recognize them as such, just as we do all other literary forms.

But inferences can become presumptuous. That the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch does *not* necessarily infer that God so called them. The command to sing does *not* necessarily exclude another kind of music. That some churches had a plurality of elders does *not* necessarily infer that all congregations did. The command to sing does *not* necessarily infer that it was congregational. That "giving and receiving" went on among primitive churches does *not* infer that they had a treasury. That entire households were baptized does *not* infer that babies were. That the scriptures are "inspired" does *not* infer verbal inerrancy. That the congregations were referred to as Churches of God and Churches of Christ does *not* infer that these are names.

I suggest that we move this three-pronged device of "direct command, approved example, and necessary inference" out of our thinking entirely, for it is found wanting in terms of being of any real value. Besides, the Bible teaches abundantly in other ways. Is. 26:3 gives us that great truth: "Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in thee." This is neither command, example or inference, but what a powerful lesson. Much of the Bible is declarative and descriptive, falling under none of these three areas, such as Jn. 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." That conveys the truth of all truths without being either command, example or inference.

How then does the Bible teach us? Just as any other literature teaches us. We don't turn to books on science and history to the beat of "commands, examples and inferences." True, the Bible is God's word, and that makes all the difference. But there is only one possible way for it to teach us, and that is by our making the same sense of it that we would any other literature. We take the commands as we find them, seek out the "sense," and apply them to ourselves as seems appropriate. So with examples. So with all of it.

The Quakers have a term, "the sense of the meeting," that is appropriate to biblical interpretation. Once they get their heads together, with the Spirit moving them, the discussion may be prolonged. But finally, if they agree, the president will say, "I take it that the sense of the meeting is . . ."

We may study a passage for years before its "sense" strikes us. If we study more as a community, we may find the Spirit leading us to a deeper and deeper "sense" of scriptures long viewed only superficially. This simply means that the Bible teaches us through what it says, and *what it says* becomes a matter of responsible interpretation, which should go. on all through life.

As to some of the guiding principles that should be followed in responsible interpretation, we shall consider in our next and last installment. —*the Editor*

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Travel Letter . . .

A WEDDING IN TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

Ouida went with me to Texas hill country to perform a Church of Christ-Baptist wedding. I entered into this situation tangentially, from a discussion with Baptists at Baylor University. This Baptist student, to be married to a Church of Christ girl, was having a lot of problems, one being that he did not want to be married by a minister hostile to his own faith, though he was resigned to its being otherwise "Church of Christ." That everybody was out to "convert" him he was taking pretty well. Since I loved them *both* and accepted them *both* as Christians, and since I was "Church of Christ," I was asked to do the honors, albeit there was little hope that I would be all that popular a choice.

It was a typical little hill country town, with its rolling plains, howling wolves, fleeing deer, and crawling rattlers. And sometimes the religion gets as fierce as the rattlesnakes. There is a Methodist and a Baptist church, along with two Churches of Christ, recently divided over the cooperation issue. That is the reason given by an elder and deacon with whom I visited. But it is the same old story of hate and personalities. Two struggling churches in a town as big as your hip pocket. It is a sin against heaven! "We're to the place now where we'll usually speak to each other on the street," one of them assured me. So, they're making progress, Texas style!

We spent the night with the bride's parents, whom I had come to know and love in my mini-meetings, a dear and impressive couple with an intelligent and beautiful family, all devoted Church of Christ people. But they were obviously shaken by their daughter marrying "out of the church," and they were more than a little fearful that she would

become a Baptist. which they sincerely believed would be her undoing, both for now and eternity.

At the dinner and the rehearsal I got acquainted with both families, along with some of the townspeople. Being fresh from unity meetings, I was caused to see how crucial our work is for all God's people at the grassroots level. Here were two lovely, prosperous, spiritually-minded families brought together by one of life's dramatic moments. But religion was a handicap rather than a help. It would have gone better had they all been infidels gathered at the office of a justice of the peace. That way they could have all loved and accepted each other!

I was soon in love with them all, and I would have lifted some of the burdens had it been within my power. An organ was brought into the Church of Christ building for the occasion, which was a bit awkward —placing it, wiring it, playing it. I told Ouida to get a good look, for it was a rarity seldom to be seen. Our folk do not usually allow that. The restriction was that no "religious" songs could be played, including the Lord's prayer, which was also ruled out on the grounds that one line reads, "Thy kingdom come," which the Baptist contingency had requested. The Baptists pray for the coming kingdom and the Church of Christ doesn't. After all, how can you pray for what has already come! But a naive visitor like me could not be blamed for wondering if it nas yet come to that little Texas town. I was about to forget my raisin' and my manners and pray for it to come, right then and there! And mind you, this was the *liberal* Church of Christ in town!

But I loved and appreciated them everyone. The groom's father is the sheriff of the county, and all he and I needed was more time. They are teachers, coaches, business people, judges, farmers. My kind of folk —and oh, how I longed for them to find community in Jesus!

By the time the wedding began 24 hours later, I was far more emotionally involved than I should have been. The bride and groom were torn between their own sense of freedom in Christ and their sense of duty to their uneasy parents. In my quiet moments with them I urged upon them the love, peace and joy that is in Jesus, and a triumphant faith that transcends all the senseless partyism of either the Baptists or the Church of Christ, respecting their parents every step of the way.

It was all made lovely by flowers and candlelight. The mothers were poised and lovely as they were ushered to their seats, but I wondered if they might not be more weary than joyous. The attendants were all young and apparently unworried, the boys dressed as only they will be on the day of their own wedding or perhaps their funeral. The organ did its thing and followed its restrictions, though it still seemed strange in a Church of Christ. The nonreligious songs were beautifully sung and elegantly religious.

There they were before me, a divided people sitting together in one of life's tenderest moments, but if only it could have been sweetened by the quiet peace that is in Jesus. I felt myself being drained. When the groom took his place beside me, I saw that he was doing better than I, though I knew he was haunted by the fear that he might not be really loved and accepted by his new family. I watched the bride's mother, sitting there in simple dignity, as she looked upon her new son-to-be, standing at the altar, awaiting her daughter, and I realized that she too must be burdened with fear and uncertainty. I found myself praying, "Dear God, touch her heart with your love and cause her to accept him. Free her so that she can love him like You love him!"

By this time I was in no condition to perform a ceremony. But here came the bride, as lovely and sweet a person as you'd ever hope to meet, with her father at her side. There was something about it that was bearing down on me, and I feared I might not make it. At the very outset I beckoned the couple to prayer, which I had not planned on. I was praying for myself as much as for them. I asked God to give us the peace of the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit helped me in my weakness, yea, even in my agony. From that moment on it all went well and we got them married.

The Baptist and the Church of Christ folk went their separate ways, neighbors on the streets if not brothers at the altar. The happy newlyweds, smiling and full of hope, merrily ventured toward a new home and a new life together, the pellets in the hubcaps of their car sounding as beautiful to their ears as any organ ever did.

Sometime during the night they eased the organ out of the building, not unlike pallbearers carrying their burden to its resting place. It had been a good organ as organs go, and it had had a hand in history.

Ouida and I turned the old Firebird toward home and out of the hill country. After awhile I asked her to drive, for I was too exhausted for that simple task. We didn't say anything much. We just drove along those lonely roads, thinking. She didn't say what she was thinking, but I was thinking about how I almost blew a wedding. And I thought about the hill country and its people. I understand why President Johnson talked about it the way he did. I thought of the rolling hills, sporting their jagged rocks as if they were diamonds, and of the wolves, moaning their cries through the night as if they might be muted calls for peace from their Creator, and of the rattlesnakes crawling beneath any old rock, fearing man more than each other.

And I thought of the Baptist and Church of Christ people, who occasionally get together in the hill country and marry their kids off to each other. It is a dubious kind of fellowship. They will surely do better than that in heaven, where at least one of their problems will be solved, for there they will neither marry nor be given in marriage! —*the Editor*

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IMAGINATION: THE SECRET OF LOVING

Robert Meyers

We are born locked in the prison of self, and Jesus understood our dilemma. Against the grim word of a Hawthorne —"What jailor so inexorable as one's self!" —he spoke the thrilling promise: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

His prescription for breaking out of the mirror-lined dungeon where we see only ourselves was written large in his own life: we walk free by loving one another. Love is the sending of the heart upon a journey, an escape from the prison of self to breathe the air of another's personhood.

But love, the supreme imperative of the Christian life, cannot exist except in people who have developed the faculty we call *imagination.* This is the prelude to loving, the strange power by which we discover what it is like to be someone else. In that magic moment we are free to love, and thus to fulfill the highest command of Christ.

But for most of us, it is not easy. It takes practice to learn to stand in another's shoes, to live inside another's skin, to feel as another feels. We cannot do it literally, so that unless imagination frees us to make such journeys they cannot be made. No wonder William Penn said, "Love is the hardest lesson of Christianity."

What a large order Paul gave his Philippian friends when he said to them, "Let this mind be in you which was in Christ." They could only obey if they had enough imagination to escape their own minds and invite his in. Breaking free of habitual ways of responding, they would have to ask: "How would my Lord have acted in such a moment?" and their imaginations would have to picture him in a response which they could imitate.

It may sound startling, but the fact is that there is no sainthood without imagination. "Think constantly of those in prison as if you were prisoners at their side," the author of *Hebrews* tells his readers. But he is requiring an act of pure imagination. Everything hinges on the "as if." People with stunted imaginations will not be able to escape their own hearts to be behind bars with others.

Critics of Christianity seem sometimes to have understood this better than its defenders. Walter Kaufmann's provocative book, *The Faith of a Heretic,* has buried in it somewhere a sentence I cannot forget:

> "Even the difference between theism and atheism is not nearly so profound as that between those who feel and those who do not feel their brothers' torments."

One ought to memorize it and call it up daily. A greater gulf between imaginative and unimaginative people than between believers and unbelievers! If that seems radical, remember that a man who does not feel the anguish of others is so distant from the mind of Christ that he is a practical skeptic no matter how often he says, "Lord, Lord." It is one of history's ironies that the man who linked imagination most closely with goodness was excelled from Oxford University for writing an essay called "The Necessity of Atheism." Shelley, writing a defense of poetry in later years, put the relationship between Christianity and imagination as succinctly as it can be done.

"A man, to be greatly good, must *imagine* intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination."

It takes only moments of reflection to know how true Shelley's proposition is, yet I think most Christians have not consciously faced the challenge it provides. Its implication is that anything in modern life which blunts or stifles the imagination is working directly at odds with our Christian hopes. If this is true, we must find every possible way of encouraging the "going out" of mind and heart in the imaginative act.

Such journeys are costly. It is far easier to stay at home and *ask* how people are, than to flee the prison of one's own comfort and learn by identification. "I do not ask the wounded person how he feels," Whitman declared. "I myself become the wounded person." It is a profoundly Christian statement.

Perhaps, in direst circumstances and —for a limited time, one might have to blunt the imagination in order to survive and be sane. When Wilfred Owen said of soldiers in World War I: "Happy are those who lose their imagination. . their hearts remain small drawn," he understood that amidst such horrors one may be unable to respond to the massive demands upon sympathy.

But the last thing a Christian wants, under the sky of the normal day, is a heart "small drawn." This is to die, not to live. "Whoever walks a furlong without sympathy," said Whitman, "walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud."

Christ saw that there were enough buffers already between one man's hurt and another's heart. The knowledge would have cost him dearly. He could not have looked so sweet and bland as popular pictures make him out. The ravages of compassion would have marked his face deeply.

He was —and insists that we be in exactly the opposite condition of in exactly the opposite condition of the one in which Somerset Maugham found his fellow novelist, Henry James. "He did not live," he said; "he observed life from a window."

Put Maugham's picture over against a remark of Paul's to see the cost of discipleship. "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for my kinsman." He would, he said, surrender his own chance for eternal happiness If this would win those with whom he identified himself. This is what it means to feel from inside another's heart.

Lacking such imagination, men may become scholars of sorts, may even become pulpit rhetoricians of renown, but they cannot be great Christians. That blessing is reserved for men like John Woolman who, toward the end of his life, had a dream in which he was so mixed with the gray mass of suffering humanity that he could no longer reply when his own name was called.

His imagination, his key to the outside, worked so well that far from being a prisoner to self he had almost lost the sense of who he was. The American novelist Theodore Dreiser forgot himself in that way once. Sherwood Anderson tells of seeing him sit and weep as he watched orphan children file back into their cheerless dormitory from the play-ground.

Men with imaginations that sensitive have fashioned all the great reforms in our history. They knew how it felt to be a slave, though they had never been one, and they made the rest of us feel it until we could not be at peace. They made us smell the filthy prisons until we cleaned them up. They made us live inside children who rose before dawn to work in factories, and slumped wearily home after darkness fell, until we were troubled enough to change laws of employment.

And in these still turbulent times of racial hatred it will be those who can escape the bondage of feeling their own color, white or black, and enter into the minds of others, who will show us the way out of the prison of prejudice.

I remember still a day years ago when the first race riots over integrated schools struck Little Rock, Arkansas. Etched on my mind is this enduring image: a tall, handsome black girl walks down the sidewalk toward the nigh school when. suddenly a white man jumps out of the crowd to spit savagely into her face.

My eye records the moment when she is fully aware of that obscene spittle on her cheek. Her eyes look straight ahead and she walks on with regal dignity, but any imaginative person among the watchers can feel the horrible wound to her sense of pride.

The man who spat on her lacked imagination, of course, or he would not have been able to perform his vulgarity. He would have *felt* all her loneliness and fear and anguish already, and it would have been impossible for him to add to it. *It would have been like spitting on himself.* All racial hatreds result from stunted imaginations.

The glory of the healthy imagination is that it teaches us to see the external event and then to *feel* what it means. Shelley called it "the creative faculty to imagine what we know." To possess facts without imagination is to become inhuman, to turn into a robot who looks real and functions in all the programmed ways, but who feels nothing.

There is a way of seeing which has nothing to do with the optic nerve. When Shakespeare's Lear cries out to blinded Gloucester on the heath: "You see how this world goes!" Gloucester answers, "I see it . . . feelingly." Many with 20-20 vision do not see that way, and their blindness is more tragic than the loss of physical sight.

Imagination is the feeling-life of the mind. He who lacks it does not involve himself in his knowing; he stands apart from it, a computer with no heart, only half knowing. Elizabeth Peabody was asked one time how she happened to run into a tree on the Boston Common. Her explanation was classic: "I saw it, but I did not realize it." It is the story of our lives.

In my own childhood I was deliberately trained to see without feeling, to see without realizing what I saw. A small example comes to mind. I was taught to deride the making of the sign of the cross by people whose religion was different from my own. I can remember crude jests about it. I could not imagine how that ritual could have meaning.

Perhaps if I had said those very words aloud, slowly, I might have seen the prison I was in. My deficiency was precisely that: *I could not imagine.* The moment when I could, at last, came many years later when I sat one afternoon reading James Agee's lyrical book, *A Death in the Family.* Gripped by a woman's agonized sense of loss, I found these words on the page before me:

"'O God, if it be Thy will,' she whispered. She could not think of anything more. She made the sign of the Cross again, slowly, deeply and widely upon herself, and she felt something of the shape of the Cross: strength and quiet."

I understood then, and my imagination released me from the narrow conviction that every man who makes the sign of the cross does it mechanically and without benefit. I would, perhaps, never make it myself, but I had stood for a moment in another's place and understood for the first time how consoling it might be.

Multiply that single incident a thousand times and you begin to understand the desperation behind Thoreau's question: "Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?"

It happens so seldom that it seems, indeed, a miracle. "I sat where they sat," Ezekiel marveled long ago, overwhelmed by the difference it made to get out of himself. And a greater prophet than he knelt one day while a woman stood red-faced with shame before men who could not identify either with her hunger or her humiliation. They were in prison. Jesus, who dismissed her tenderly, was free —liberated by the feeling-life of his mind.

We can understand now why George Bernard Shaw said what he did in his play about Joan of Arc. Some men in that play, dull of heart, listen to Joan's story of what happened to her. Then they deliver what all such men believe to be the ultimate put-down:

"That is only your imagination."

"Of course," she replies. "That is how God speaks to us."

We should have known. Because it is also how we speak to Him. And to each other.
—Robert Meyers, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

One brother up East writes us of his change of preaching ministry from a Church of Christ to a Christian Church, one, by the way, that enjoys fellowship with both the Disciples and Independents. He tells of the problem this is to the parents on both sides, indicating that one of them may feel compelled to resign from the eldership. It reveals what we have done to ourselves when a young minister's main problem in moving from one Restoration group to another is two sets of distraught parents. For a brother to "go to the Christian Church" is taken far more seriously in some Church of Christ circles than if he were trifling on his wife, for that is some sort of "mortal sin" that can be forgiven neither in this world nor in the world to come. One purpose of this journal is to help liberate our people from unnecessary and debilitating bondage. We would urge such parents to keep in mind what their son *is* — his character, devotion to Jesus, mission in life — and not to judge him by congregational affiliation. If Jesus were judged on the basis of affiliation rather than character, then his life was a complete failure.

Friendswood Church of Chnst, Friendswood, Tx., which supports a missionary in Austria, recently reported that Austria has 20 million people and only three Christians.

Smithlawn Church of Christ in Lubbock conducts a home for unwed mothers-to-be, along with an adoption service. One of their recent communications was signed "Smithlawn Home Committee and Staff, and Smithlawn Girls and Babies." They say their policy is what Jesus said in John 8:11: "Neither do I condemn you: go, and sin no more." To their critics they explain that their work is a labor of love, a love for *souls*, both of the girls and the babies.

We apparently have not yet debated *everything.* Two brothers recently conducted a debate on smoking. A copy can be had for 75 cents by writing Eugene Britnell, Box 5624, Little Rock, Ar. 72205. By driving by our buildings after a service one will have no trouble determining what Churches of Christ practice on that issue.

Another "walk-out" congregation has begun in Cleburne, Texas, made up of families leaving the Westside Church of Christ. It is meeting in the bank community room. Westside's bulletin reports: "Among the false doctrines taught by this movement is that there is no sin committed if people worship with instrumental music; that there are

Christians in all denominations, and some of them believe the Church of Christ is just one among many denominations."

Another such group is meeting as "Christians meeting at 1103 E. 7th, Hutchinson, Kansas, in the name of Christ." Their bulletin says: "Entrance into this body is by immersion or identification of immersed believers in Jesus Christ. Those not Christians are taught to believe in Christ with the whole heart, to change their life to conform to the Way of Christ, to confess their faith in Jesus and to be baptized into union with Him for the forgiveness of their transgressions and the reception of the indwelling Spirit." They go on to say: "We do not sit in judgment upon believers who differ from us. Instead, we quietly perform our own work and worship as we understand the Scriptures to teach. Along with other congregations of Christians, we celebrate the Lord's supper each week, we offer up in psalms and hymns the praise of our lips, and we speak our prayers in faith, confident that He who has called us is faithful to hear."

One item in the September, 1975 issue needs correcting. The item on p. 137 referring to a Church of God man who was reported baptized is not correct, if the man is Robert L. Schrienk. He was baptized for the remission of sins long before he became associated with us here. The Church of God, General Conference, believes in baptism for the remission of sins. Therefore, we accepted Bob because he was already our brother in Christ. He left them because of their leadership both locally and nationally which he felt was not in accord with God's will. I agree with your stand against "rebaptism" in order to appease the brethren. We must please God, not man. —*Mac D. Culver, Church of Christ, Box* 1173, *Front Royal, Va. 22630.*

Those who have thought of sending us a list of names (5 for only 5.00), but have not done so, may be influenced by these statements by new subscribers: "I don't know who sent my name in, but I'm glad they did. Enclosed is 5.00 and a list of five more." "I saw your paper while working at the Ft. Worth post office. It looked interesting, so I thought I'd subscribe."

Special for 1976

Starting in January, Carl Ketcherside will present his "Pilgrimage of Joy," which will be the story of his eventful life. This will run through thirty installments, extending through 1978, the Lord willing. Several of these are already in hand, ready for the printer, and we have tested them in family reading. You are in for a treat, that's for sure. The problem is going to be in having to wait a month to see what young Carl and then an older Carl is up to next. We are hopeful of eventually putting this in book form, even though it will be a part of the bound volumes of this journal. Ouida and I are pleased to be able to present this series to the public, not only because of our cherished friendship with Carl and Nell (who is also very much a part of the story), but as a token of our appreciation for their

work in *Mission Messenger* for all these 37 years. That their efforts in that little journal could have such an impact for a freer and more loving disciple brotherhood should cause us to keep on believing in the triumph of good, in the providential care of God, in this country, in the power of modest efforts under God, and in the good sense of lots and lots of people.

Carl will also write, indefinitely, a column that we're going to call "Down Home with Carl," in which he will keep us posted on what he and Nell are up to these days, the books he's publishing, the places he's going, and what he's thinking, if anything. This will provide at least partial continuity with his long years as an editor which ends next month. It demonstrates once more (as if we need to be reminded!) that all good things must end, but that is part of the glory of life in that all such ends are really but new beginnings. We welcome Carl aboard, and we greet many, many new subscribers who are with us mainly because he has taken passage.

We are also pleased to announce that this journal will join the nation and the world in celebrating our Bicentennial next year. This we will do by presenting some art creations by Talmage Minter, depicting both our nation and our Movement. Along with this we will begin a new series, replacing the present one on the nature of the Bible, on historical highlights of the Restoration Movement. We believe you will find this both informative and encouraging, and it is proper to present it in the framework of the Bicentennial celebration.

We will continue our series on *The Word Abused* all through 1976. Too bad that there has been that much abuse! We will then present to those who request it our bound volume under that title, all of 1975 and 1976 in one volume. You may order the double volume for 1973-74 for 4.95, which is now available, along with *The Restoration Mind,* 1971-72, for 4.50.

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